

## **Staff Memorandum**

**To: All DOC Staff**

**From: Commissioner Paul Schnell**

**Re: Keeping your family healthy, social distancing, visiting, and inmate assignments**

**Date: March 26, 2020**

By now you have had time to digest the Governor's executive order limiting the reasons we may all leave our homes. It can be difficult for us to continue coming to work while many of our family, friends, and other loved ones are staying at home. But recognize that your work is viewed as critical to the basic functioning of our state and that's why we must keep doing it.

That's also why we are doing everything we can to protect your health and safety. We continue daily consultations with the Department of Health and other public health experts to ensure every decision we make is based on what the experts tell us about how COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person and how to minimize the risk of that happening.

As of this memo, we have not detected COVID-19 in any facility or office. And I want to update you on a few items.

### **Keeping Your Family Healthy and Protecting Your Home**

We are consulting with health experts and studying what steps we can all take to protect our families and homes as we continue going to work. Here are some suggestions:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds when you **leave** work.
- Consider using an alternate entry point to your home other than the main door used by others in your household.
- Take your shoes off, wash your hands, and consider taking a shower right when you get home.
- Change your clothes in the same place every day as soon as you get home.
- Avoid sharing foods.
- Identify a room or area in your home where you (or others) can isolate if symptoms develop.
- Frequently disinfect surfaces throughout your home, especially in heavily-trafficked areas.

### **Social Distancing**

Please continue to be mindful of social distancing. Other than frequent hand washing and avoiding touching your face, social distancing is the best way to stay healthy.

We recognize that social distancing is difficult in the facilities. But we believe it is possible. I am committed to protecting your health and safety during this public health crisis, while we keep facility programs open for as long as possible and continue our critical work to supervise

offenders. Programming is critical to facility security and stability – as long as we are smart about how we do it.

That's why I have directed every facility and field services leadership to implement plans that will help us follow through on that commitment.

We must understand where the risk is with respect to COVID-19 transmission. Health experts tell us that simply being near someone for a few minutes presents minimal risk. We are all near other people as we continue going to the grocery store, gas station, and other daily activities. But we have to avoid the types of contact health experts warn us about:

- “Close contact” with an infected person for a prolonged period of time. What that generally means is being within about 6 feet of someone for about 10 minutes or more.
- Having direct contact with infectious secretions from an infected person – for example being directly coughed or sneezed on by an infected person.

Avoiding these types of exposures is possible in our facilities. We are working to expand your ability to avoid these exposures. I urge you to be mindful of your own spacing relative to other people. If you feel as though not enough is being done on this front, please engage through your chain of command to raise concerns. It is only through informed feedback that necessary adjustments can be made.

### **Visiting Closure**

We are continuing to limit traffic in and out of the facilities. For that reason, in-person visiting will continue to be suspended at all DOC facilities as we deal with the COVID-19 outbreak. We recognize the importance of inmates' connections with loved ones, so we are continuing to explore ways to expand the availability of electronic visiting, including potential reduction or waiver of fees. We also continue to offer two free 5-minute phone calls per week.

### **Inmate Assignments and Compensation**

We have heard concerns about how reporting potential symptoms of COVID-19 might impact an inmate's employment status, specifically as it relates to Division Directive 204.010: Offender Assignment and Compensation Plan.

Given the current situation, I am suspending the policy that would terminate an inmate's assignment after being absent for 10 days, if the absence is for COVID-19 related reasons. If an inmate reports symptoms related to COVID-19, and is asked to quarantine, or take any other restrictive measure, they will not be in danger of losing employment after 10 days, and their salary level will remain the same when they return to work.